

## Undergraduate Degree Fields

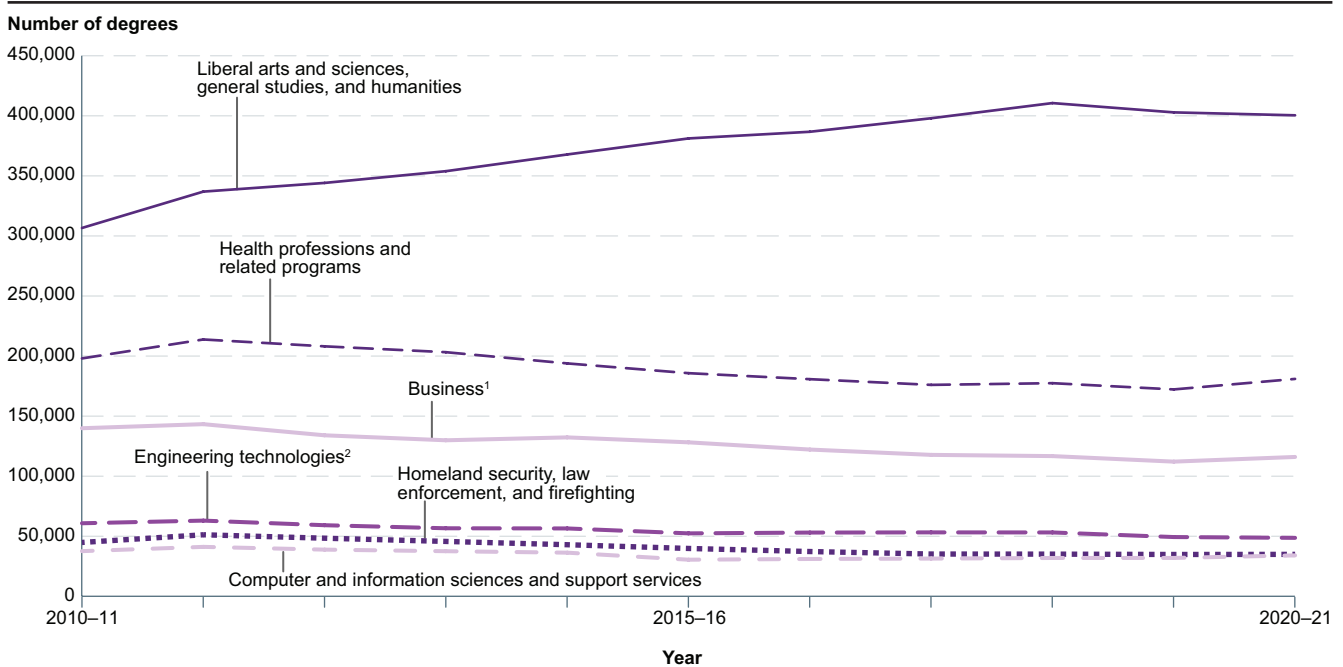
In 2020–21, two-thirds of the 1.0 million associate’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions within the United States were concentrated in three fields of study: liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (400,400 degrees); health professions and related programs (181,000 degrees); and business (116,100 degrees). Of the 2.1 million bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2020–21, some 58 percent were concentrated in six fields of study: business (391,400 degrees); health professions and related programs (268,000 degrees); social sciences and history (160,800 degrees); biological and biomedical sciences (131,500 degrees); psychology (126,900 degrees); and engineering (126,000 degrees).

Postsecondary institutions within the United States<sup>1</sup> conferred 3.1 million undergraduate degrees in 2020–21. These included 1.0 million associate’s degrees and 2.1 million bachelor’s degrees. The majority of both associate’s and bachelor’s degrees were conferred to

female students. At both levels, business and health professions and related programs were among the top three most common fields of study in which degrees were conferred to students in each racial/ethnic group.

### Associate’s Degrees by Field of Study

**Figure 1. Number of associate’s degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2010–11 through 2020–21**



<sup>1</sup> In order to be consistent with the definition of “business” for bachelor’s degree data, “business” is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as well as culinary, entertainment, and personal services.  
<sup>2</sup> Includes engineering technologies and engineering-related fields; construction trades; and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians.  
 NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of associate’s degrees were conferred in 2020–21. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data in this figure are based on the 2020 Classification of Instructional Programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011 through Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 321.10.

## Undergraduate Degree Fields

In 2020-21, postsecondary institutions conferred 1.0 million associate's degrees. More than three-quarters of these degrees (79 percent) were concentrated in six fields of study:

- liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (400,400 degrees, 39 percent);
- health professions and related programs (181,000 degrees, 17 percent);
- business<sup>2</sup> (116,100 degrees, 11 percent);
- engineering technologies<sup>3</sup> (48,700 degrees, 5 percent);
- homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (35,000 degrees, 3 percent); and
- computer and information sciences and support services (34,200 degrees, 3 percent).

The top three fields alone accounted for two-thirds of associate's degrees conferred and were the most common fields of study in which degrees were conferred in 2020-21 to students in each racial/ethnic group and to U.S. nonresident<sup>4</sup> students.

Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the total number of associate's degrees conferred increased from 943,500 degrees to 1,036,400 degrees. Over this time period, trends in the numbers of associate's degrees conferred varied by field of study. Of the top six fields of study in 2020-21, only the field of liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities showed an increase in the number of associate's degrees conferred (from 306,700 to 400,400 degrees, or 31 percent). The remaining five of the six top fields of study in 2020-21 each saw a decrease in the number of associate's degrees conferred during this time period:

- homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (from 44,900 to 35,000 degrees, or 22 percent);
- engineering technologies (from 60,900 to 48,700 degrees, or 20 percent);
- business (from 140,000 to 116,100 degrees, or 17 percent);
- computer and information sciences and support services (from 37,700 to 34,200 degrees, or 9 percent); and
- health professions and related programs (from 198,100 to 181,000 degrees, or 9 percent).

## Chapter: 3/Postsecondary Education

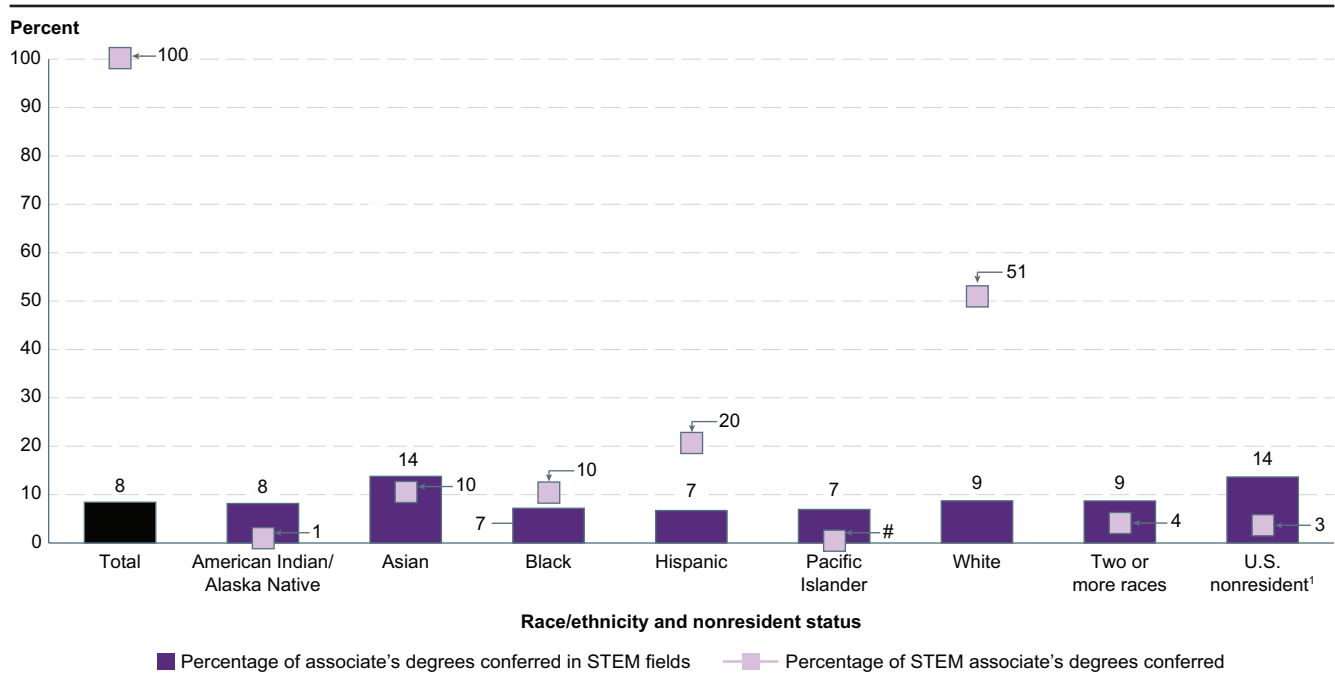
### Section: Completions and Graduation Rates

Despite these general trends over the past decade, degrees conferred in two of the six top fields of study in 2020-21 have seen opposite patterns since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Compared with 2018-19 (the last full academic year prior to the pandemic), the number of degrees conferred in 2020-21 was 2 percent lower for liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities, and 2 percent higher for health professions and related programs.<sup>5</sup>

Among other fields in which at least 10,000 associate's degrees were conferred in 2020-21, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2010-11 and 2020-21 in the following fields:

- social sciences and history (from 12,800 to 28,800 degrees);
- physical sciences and science technologies (from 5,100 to 10,200 degrees); and
- psychology (from 3,900 to 18,800 degrees).

The opposite was true in the field of legal professions and studies, for which the number of associate's degrees conferred decreased by half from 2010-11 to 2020-21 (from 11,600 to 5,800 degrees).

**Associate's Degrees and STEM****Figure 2. Percentage and percentage distribution of associate's degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity and U.S. nonresident status: Academic year 2020–21**

# Rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage distribution of STEM degrees conferred by race/ethnicity presented here differs from the distribution in table 318.45 of the *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, which excludes U.S. nonresidents from the distribution.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race/ethnicity categories exclude U.S. nonresidents. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail does not sum to total due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 318.45 and 321.30.

In 2020–21, of the 1,036,400 million associate's degrees conferred, 8 percent (87,400 degrees) were in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)<sup>6</sup> field. Between 2010–11 and 2020–21, the overall percentage of associate's degrees conferred in a STEM field remained between 8 and 9 percent. Of all the associate's degrees conferred to each racial/ethnic group in 2020–21, the percentage conferred in a STEM field varied by group and was highest for Asian students. Specifically, of the associate's degrees conferred to each group, the percentage conferred in a STEM field was:

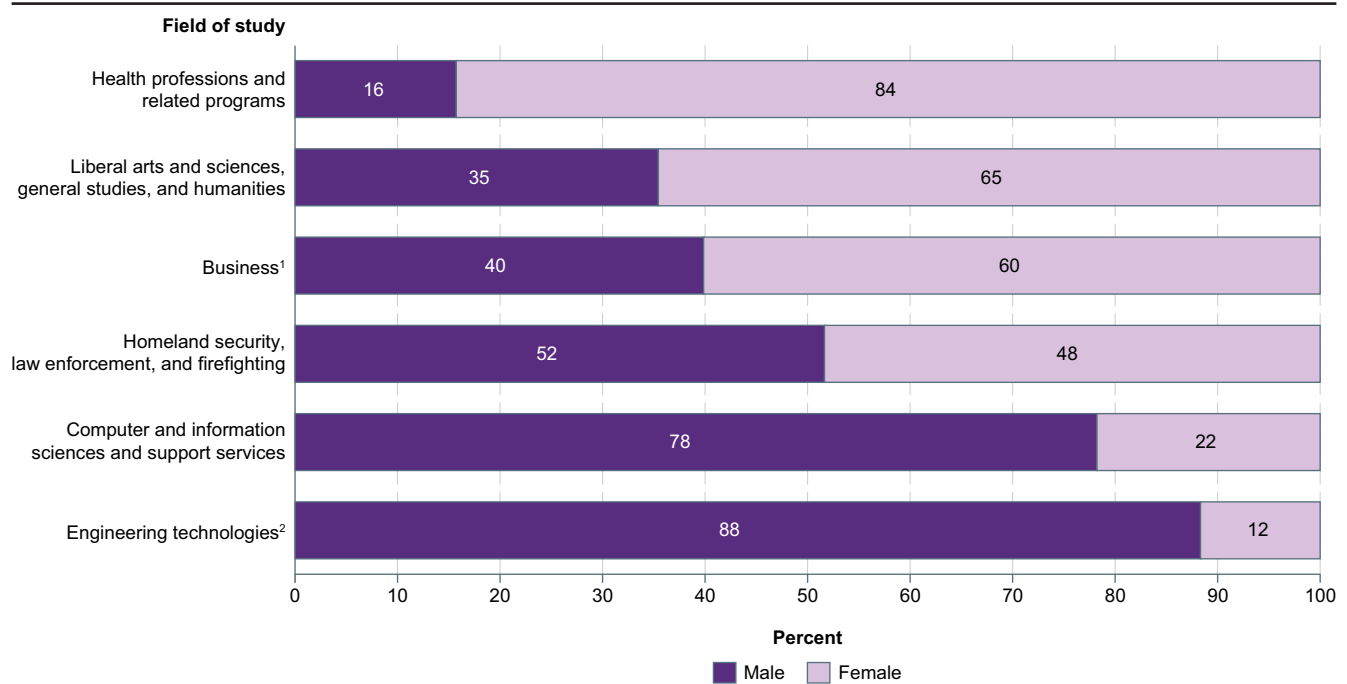
- 14 percent for Asian students;
- 9 percent each for White students and students of Two or more races;
- 8 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students; and
- 7 percent each for Black, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic students.

Among U.S. nonresident students, 14 percent of associate's degrees conferred were in a STEM field, which was similar to the percentage for Asian students.

Because racial/ethnic groups earned different shares of overall associate's degrees conferred, the groups with the highest rates of STEM degrees conferred may not make up the largest shares of all STEM degrees. Of the 87,400 associate's degrees conferred in a STEM field in 2020–21, more than half were earned by White students. Specifically, of all associate's degrees conferred in a STEM<sup>7</sup> field:

- 51 percent were conferred to White students;
- 20 percent were conferred to Hispanic students;
- 10 percent each were conferred to Asian and Black students;
- 4 percent were conferred to students of Two or more races;
- 1 percent were conferred to American Indian/Alaska Native students; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent were conferred to Pacific Islander students.

Three percent of associate's degrees in a STEM field were conferred to U.S. nonresident students.

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of associate's degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2020–21**

<sup>1</sup> In order to be consistent with the definition of “business” for bachelor’s degree data, “business” is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as culinary, entertainment, and personal services.

<sup>2</sup> Includes engineering technologies and engineering-related fields; construction trades; and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of associate’s degrees were conferred in 2020–21. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 321.10.

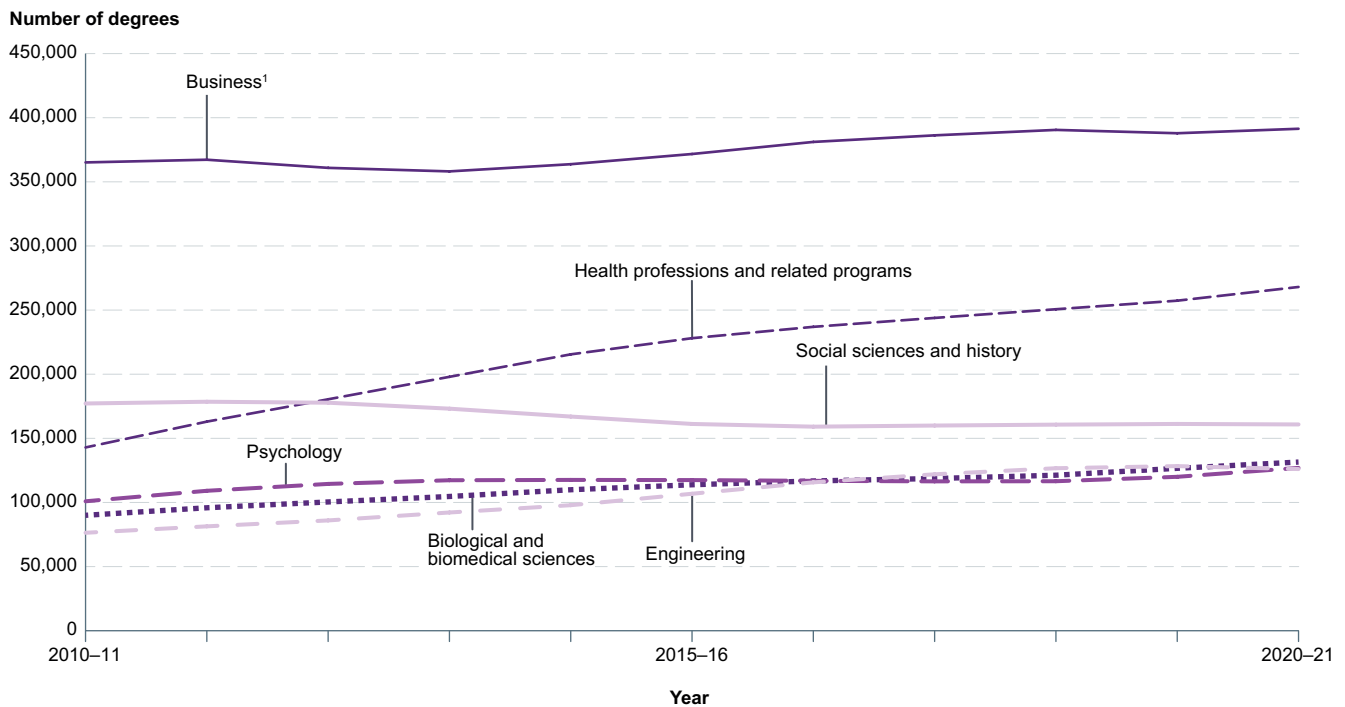
### Associate’s Degrees by Sex

In 2020–21, females earned 63 percent (653,400 degrees) and males earned 37 percent (383,000 degrees) of all associate’s degrees conferred. Of the six fields in which the most associate’s degrees were conferred in 2020–21, females were conferred the majority of degrees in the top three fields, as follows:

- 84 percent in health professions and related programs;
- 65 percent in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; and
- 60 percent in business.

The majority of associate’s degrees in the three remaining top fields of study were conferred to males, as follows:

- 88 percent in engineering technologies;
- 78 percent in computer and information sciences and support services; and
- 52 percent in homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting.

**Bachelor's Degrees by Field of Study****Figure 4. Number of bachelor's degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2010–11 through 2020–21**

<sup>1</sup> "Business" is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as culinary, entertainment, and personal services. NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2020–21. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data in this figure are based on the 2020 Classification of Instructional Programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011 through Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 322.10; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 322.10.

Postsecondary institutions conferred 2.1 million bachelor's degrees in 2020–21. More than half (58 percent) were concentrated in these six fields of study:

- business (391,400 degrees, or 19 percent);
- health professions and related programs (268,000 degrees, or 13 percent);
- social sciences and history (160,800 degrees, or 8 percent);
- biological and biomedical sciences (131,500, or 6 percent);
- psychology (126,900, or 6 percent); and
- engineering (126,000 degrees, or 6 percent).

Of these six fields of study, the top two fields were also the most common fields for which degrees were conferred to students in each racial/ethnic group in 2020–21. The top two fields of study for which degrees were conferred to U.S. nonresident students, however, were business and engineering.

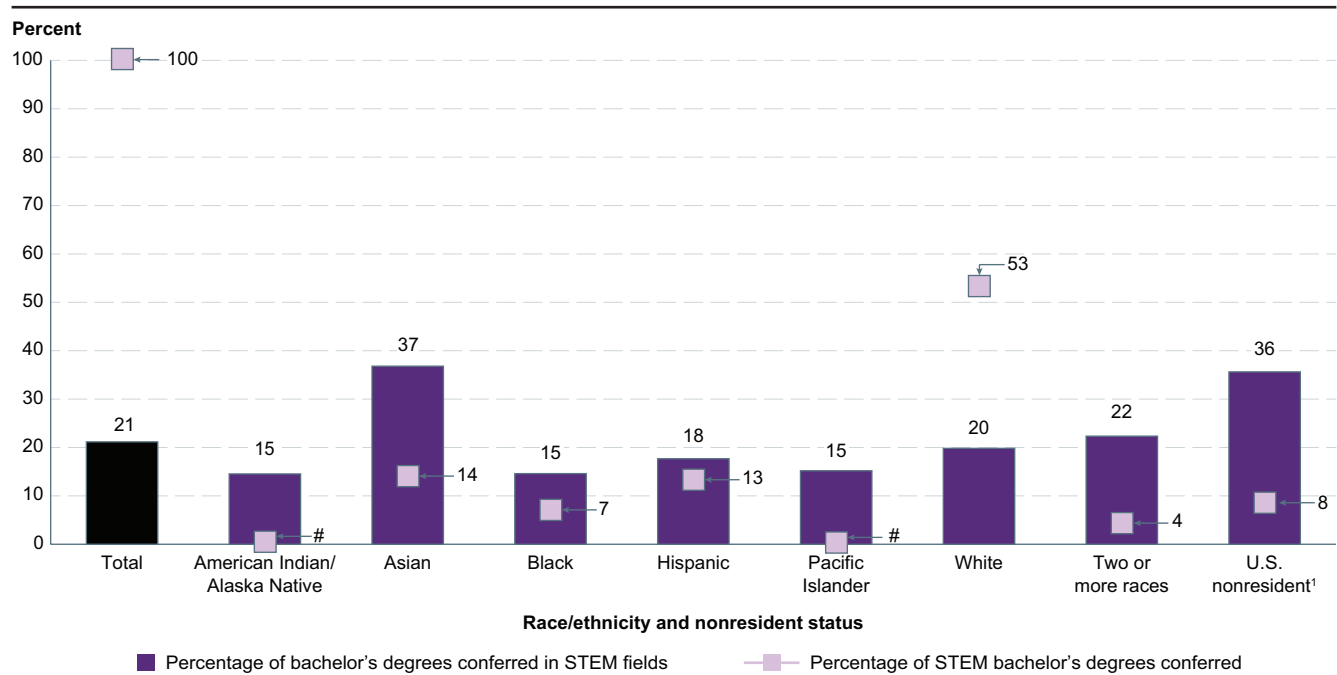
Between 2010–11 and 2020–21, trends in the numbers of bachelor's degrees conferred varied by field of study. The total number of bachelor's degrees conferred increased by 20 percent, from 1.7 million to 2.1 million between 2010–11

and 2020–21. Over this time period, of the top six fields of study in 2020–21, the following five fields each saw an increase in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred:

- health professions and related programs (from 142,900 to 268,000 degrees, or 88 percent);
- engineering (from 76,400 to 126,000 degrees, or 65 percent);
- biological and biomedical sciences (from 90,000 to 131,500 degrees, or 46 percent);
- psychology (from 100,900 to 126,900 degrees, or 26 percent); and
- business (from 365,100 to 391,400 degrees, or 7 percent).

Of the top six fields in 2020–21, only social sciences and history showed a decrease in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred (from 177,200 to 160,800 degrees, or 9 percent decrease).

Among other fields in which more than 10,000 bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2020–21, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2010–11 and 2020–21 in computer and information sciences (from 43,100 to 104,900 degrees, an increase of 144 percent).

**Bachelor's Degrees and STEM****Figure 5. Percentage and percentage distribution of bachelor's degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity and U.S. nonresident status: Academic year 2020–21**

# Rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage distribution of STEM degrees conferred by race/ethnicity presented here differs from the distribution in table 318.45 of the *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, which excludes U.S. nonresidents from the distribution.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data in this figure are based on the 2020 Classification of Instructional Programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Race/ethnicity categories exclude U.S. nonresidents. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail does not sum to total due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 318.45 and 322.30.

Among the 2,066,400 million bachelor's degrees conferred in 2020–21, some 21 percent (437,300 degrees) were in a STEM field. Of all the bachelor's degrees conferred to each racial/ethnic group in 2020–21, the percentage conferred in a STEM field varied by group and was highest for Asian students. Specifically, of the bachelor's degrees conferred to each group, the percentage conferred in a STEM field was:

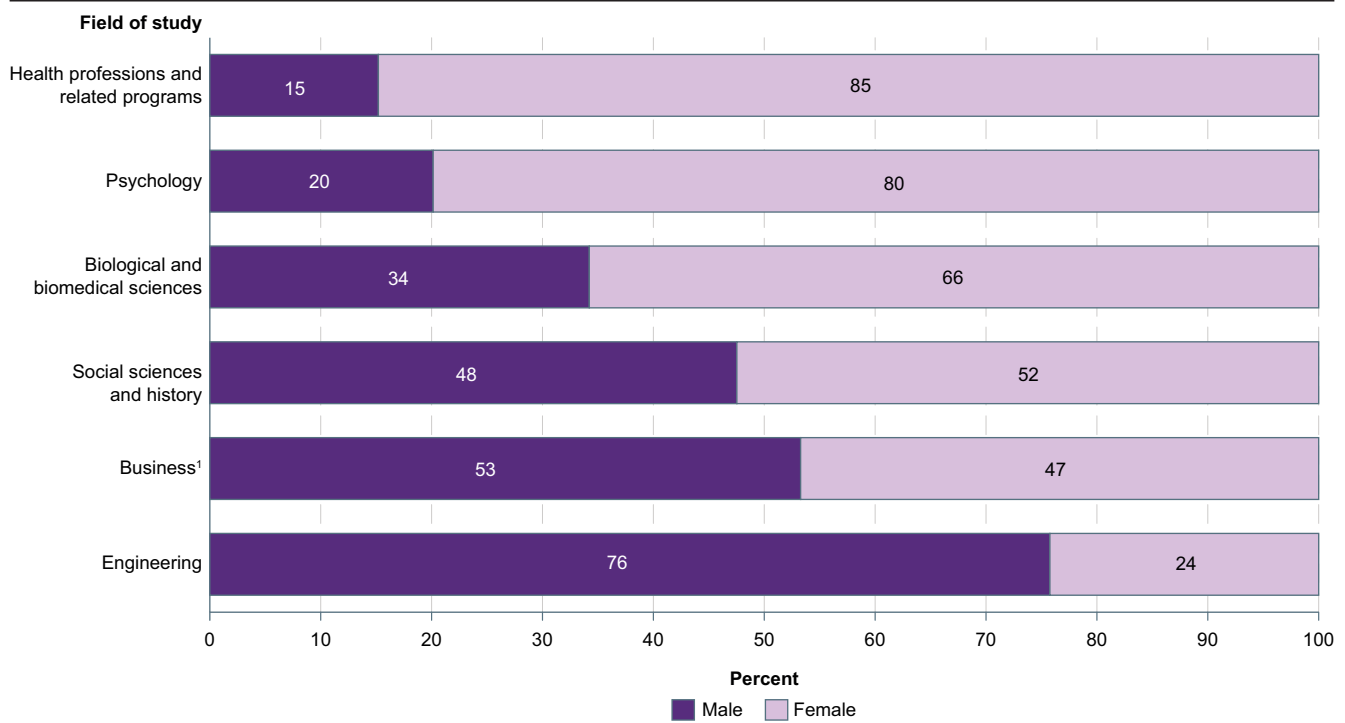
- 37 percent for Asian students;
- 22 percent for students of Two or more races;
- 20 percent for White students;
- 18 percent for Hispanic students; and
- 15 percent each for Pacific Islander, Black, and American Indian/Alaska native students.

Among U.S. nonresident students, 36 percent of bachelor's degrees conferred were in a STEM field.

Similar to the pattern observed for associate's degrees, White students earned the majority of the bachelor's degrees in a STEM field. Specifically, of all bachelor's degrees conferred in a STEM<sup>7</sup> field:

- 53 percent were conferred to White students;
- 14 percent were conferred to Asian students;
- 13 percent were conferred to Hispanic students;
- 7 percent were conferred to Black students;
- 4 percent were conferred to students of Two or more races; and
- Less than one-half of 1 percent each were conferred to American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander students.

Eight percent of bachelor's degrees in a STEM field were conferred to U.S. nonresident students.

**Bachelor's Degrees by Sex****Figure 6. Percentage distribution of bachelor's degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2020–21**

<sup>1</sup> "Business" is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as culinary, entertainment, and personal services.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2020–21. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data in this figure are based on the 2020 Classification of Instructional Programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 322.40 and 322.50.

Also, as with the pattern observed for associate's degrees, the majority of bachelor's degrees were conferred to females in 2020–21. In 2020–21, females earned 58 percent (1,205,700 million degrees) and males earned 42 percent (860,800 degrees) of all bachelor's degrees conferred. Of the six fields in which the most bachelor's degrees were

conferred in 2020–21, females earned the majority of degrees in these four:

- health professions and related programs (85 percent);
- psychology (80 percent);
- biological and biomedical sciences (66 percent); and
- social sciences and history (52 percent).

Males earned the majority of degrees conferred in engineering (76 percent) and business (53 percent).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Data in this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> Personal and culinary services have been added to the definition of “business” for associate’s degree data in order to be consistent with the definition of “business” for bachelor’s degree data. Thus, for all data in this indicator, “business” is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as culinary, entertainment, and personal services.

<sup>3</sup> Includes engineering technologies and engineering-related fields; construction trades; and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians.

<sup>4</sup> In the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), racial/ethnic data were not collected for U.S. nonresident students (previously known as nonresident alien students), and their data were compiled as a separate group.

<sup>5</sup> The number of degrees conferred in computer and information sciences and support services was also higher in 2020-21 than in 2018-19, but this trend began in 2015-16.

<sup>6</sup> STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Construction trades and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians are categorized as engineering technologies in some tables to facilitate trend comparisons but are not included as STEM fields in this indicator.

<sup>7</sup> The percentage distribution of STEM degrees conferred by race/ethnicity presented here differs from the distribution in table 318.45 of the *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, which excludes U.S. nonresidents from the distribution.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 318.45, 321.10, 321.30, 322.10, 322.30, 322.40, and 322.50; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 318.45 and 322.10

**Related indicators and resources:** [Employment Outcomes of Bachelor’s Degree Holders](#); [Graduate Degree Fields](#); [Post-Bachelor’s Employment Outcomes by Sex and Race/Ethnicity \[The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight\]](#); [Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Conferred](#); [Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Fields](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

**Glossary:** Associate’s degree; Bachelor’s degree; Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP); Racial/ethnic group; STEM fields